



Prayer as the Impossible Grace of Forgiveness

Matthew 6:9-13

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Matthew 6:9-13

“This, then, is how you should pray:

‘Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.’”

[“A War of Loves” by David Bennett](#)

“Prayer is weakness leaning on omnipotence.”

- W.S. Bowd

“The most holy and important practice in the spiritual life is the presence of God – that is, every moment to take great pleasure that God is with you.”

- Brother Lawrence

Matthew 6:14

“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”

1. Jesus’ Cross: The Divine Reality of Forgiveness

"There is no better wood for feeding the fire of God's love than the wood of the Cross."

- St Ignatius of Lyola

Romans 4:4

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

“Blessed are those

whose transgressions are forgiven,

whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the one

whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

2. The Process and Impossibility of Forgiveness

“Religious faith is not merely a way of making sense of the world but also a way of acknowledging the nonsensicality of the world, neither to deny nor prematurely to resolve it. Of course, the painful tension between the frailty of life and its infinite value does and should propel action, alleviate suffering, to advance medicine, to stop injustice and violence, to act in love but faith reminds us that action may staunch but will not heal the wound at the heart of existence because it will only be healed only at the depth which we see through a glass darkly.”

- Judith Wolfe, Professor of Philosophical Theology, University of St. Andrews

“The ultimate proof of total forgiveness takes place when we sincerely petition the Father to let those who have hurt us off the hook—even if they have hurt not only us, but also those close to us. Forgiveness is a process which, sometimes by a miraculous grace of God can become total but usually takes a long, prayerful and painful journey of relinquishing the person of the just recompense for their actions. Forgiveness does not mean we condone, agree, or even should re-establish relationship with the person, but forgiveness means relinquishing the effects of sin back into God’s hands.”

- R.T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness*

“Detached forgiveness—there is a reduction in negative feelings toward the offender, but no reconciliation takes place. Limited forgiveness—there is a reduction in negative feelings toward the offender, and the relationship is partially restored, though there is a decrease in the emotional intensity of the relationship. Full forgiveness—there is a total cessation of negative feelings toward the offender, and the relationship is fully restored.”

- R.T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness*

3. Prayer as the pardoning presence of God in and through us.

Proverbs 19:11

A man's wisdom gives him patience;
it is to his glory to overlook an offense.

“In our case, God often raises up an enemy to see if we really want to be like Jesus.”

- C.H. Spurgeon

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Hebrews 12:15

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

“You are a wounded healer if you have scars of your own. Such ministry cannot prevent suffering, of course. Such is not possible in our fallen human condition. But it can, [Henry] Nouwen writes, ‘prevent people from suffering for the wrong reasons.’ He explains, ‘When we become aware that we do not have to escape our pains, but that we can mobilize them into a common search for life, those very pains are transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope.’”

- Karen Swallow Prior, Professor of Literature

“These words are a much-needed balm. They also offer a gentle, necessary challenge. The temptation amid so many revelations of harm—especially within the context of the church, which is supposed to be a place of refuge, safety and love—is retreat or denial or even counterattack. But to have compassion—literally, to suffer with someone—is the opposite of this temptation. To have compassion is to share someone's hurt. A wound is, both

literally and metaphorically, an opening. To be open is to be vulnerable. And to be vulnerable with and for another is a gift. It is also a kind of power, one that can be wielded in ways that further wound or in ways that help heal.”

- Karen Swallow Prior, Professor of Literature

“But how can I know that there is no bitterness left? I would reply: (1) when there is no desire to get even or punish, (2) when I do or say nothing that would hurt their reputation or future, and (3) when I truly wish them well in all they seek to do.”

- R.T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness*